DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 301 252 JC 880 548

AUTHOR LaPaglia, Nancy
TITLE Humanities 100: A Remedial Course That Uses a Children's Literature Anthology as the Text.
PUB DATE Oct 88
NOTE 15p.;Paper presented at the City Colleges of Chicago National Literature Conference (3rd, Chicago, IL, October 14-15, 1988).
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Childrens Literature; Class Activities; Community Colleges; *Course Content; Course Descriptions; *Humanities Instruction; Learning Activities; Reading Aloud to Others; *Remedial Instruction; *Remedial Reading; Student Reaction; *Textbook Selection; Two Year Colleges

ABSTRACT

A major problem in any remedial course is finding a valid textbook that underprepared students can read. At Daley College, in Illinois, "Classics of Children's Literature" (Griffeth and Frey, editors) is used as the text in Humanities 100, one of several remedial courses offered for college credit to help students meet full-time eligibility requirements. The anthology allows the class to begin on any level, from stories meant for pre-school children to those intended to be read aloud by adults. The stories, which cover a variety of subjects and evoke a wide range of feelings, represent worthwhile, world-class literature. The students do not seem to be embarrassed to read children's stories, in part because the book is an actual college text and also because students are encouraged to read aloud to children. Other class activities include: (1) completing 12 one-page writing assignments on the readings, music, painting, or other aspects of the humanities; (2) working in class on the mechanics of English; (3) reading aloud in class and at home; (4) writing 12 letters as citizens, consumers, friends, future employees, etc.; (5) learning to use a computer-based instructional system; (6) visiting the Art Institute; and (7) writing an essay based on a presentation by a representative from a local battered women's shelter. These activities are designed to improve the students' ability to read and write, while introducing them to the humanities and fine arts and promoting responsible academic behavior. Students with high-school level skills can benefit from the course through gains in ability and confidence, and increased readiness to begin humanities survey courses. A syllabus for Humanities 100 is included, along with samples of daily assignments. (AYC)

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HUMANITIES 100: A REMEDIAL COURSE THAT USES A CHILDREN'S LITERATURE ANTHOLOGY AS THE TEXT

Nancy LaPaglia
Daley College,
City Colleges of Chicago
October 1988
CCC Literature Conference

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HUMANITIES 100: A REMEDIAL COURSE THAT USES A CHILDREN'S LITERATURE ANTHOLOGY AS THE TEXT

One of the many reasons why remedial/developmental students don't read well, and don't like to read, is that they have never been asked to read any good writing. Basal readers generally cut the heart out of literature, if they even use it. What is rich and varied or meaningful is reduced to syllable and word counting. Even Peter Rabbit can no longer go lippety-lippety. He must go hop, hop, in a new English version for "poor readers" that also replaces the museum-quality illustrations with photographs of stuffed animals. The new version is following an American tradition.

A solution, I believe, for the adult students we have in the community colleges who are poor readers is to give them real, worthwhile, world-class literature, but what literature of this kind is within the grasp of remedial students? Some teachers have tried formulaic literature, in a genre that might appeal, like science fiction, adventure stories or romantic novels a cut above the Harlequins. But unless your own particular fantasies happen to plug into a particular genre, as mine do for polite detective fiction, the books are boring. Some have tried best sellers, perhaps thinking the sex and violence would appeal, but these books also, like the readers meant for adult remedial students, do not qualify as literature either.

A solution I am trying in a course called Humanities 100 is an anthology of children's literature. It is a large collection that ranges in difficulty from Beatrix Potter, Edward Lear and folk tales to Dickens, Twain and Robert Louis Stevenson. The twentieth century is represented by C. S. Lewis, Laura Ingalls Wilder and others. I'm convinced that it solves some of the many problems involved, and I will discuss the book as soon as I give

you a brief background of the course.

WHY DID MY DEPARTMENT START OFFERING THIS COURSE? There were two main reasons. 1)We began requiring eligibility for English 101 before allowing students to register for our general humanities survey courses. Too many students were failing because they could not handle the college textbooks we use. They did not need to experience more failure, and we did not need more students who could not handle college material. But, since we prohibited these students from the required Humanities courses, we then had an obligation, I felt, to offer remediation that might prepare them for success later, when they could qualify to register.

2)More and more new students coming to Daley College were testing at the remedial level, and there was some pressure from the central administration to offer at least one "completer" course. A "completer" course adds three credit hours to the nine hours of English, reading and speech that all remedial students must take, thus completing a twelve-hour program, and thus allowing those students on state aid or other grants to qualify as full-time. Daley College now offers a choice of these completer courses in social science, biology and math, as well as in humanities.

WHO TAKES HUMANITIES 100? Students are not in the course because they know too little about the humanities. Most community college students know little about the humanities. Humanities 100 students are there because they cannot read and write at a college level. Therefore, although the subject matter is literature, music and the fine arts, this is, to a great extent, another English course. It happens to include an introduction to the instruments of the orchestra, a trip to the Art Institute of Chicago, etc. We offer only one section each semester, so some students are ESL (English as a Second Language) and some are American educated. At first, we allowed any remedial

student to register, but soon found that those who read at a very low level did not improve enough to handle our regular courses the following semester. They took Humanities 201 or 202 anyway after Humanities 100, since passing English 100 qualified them to do so, and then dropped out early, failures again. Last year we limited registration to those who test from eighth to eleventh grade in reading. (Over eleventh grade places students into English 101.) This placement system looks as if it might work better.

WHY USE AN ANTHOLOGY OF CHILDREN'S LITERATURE AS THE TEXTBOOK? A major problem in Humanities 100, or in any remedial course, is finding a valid textbook these students can read. The anthology I use, Classics of Children's Literature (Griffith and Frey, Second Edition, Macmillan, 1987), allows us to begin on any level, from Squirrel Nutkin to A Christmas Carol, from stories meant for pre-school children to stories read by adults. These stories are a pleasure to read, for the teacher as well as the students. (Carlo Collodi's Pinocchio, if you haven't read it for years, is filled with a wonderful sly humor.) The stories have not been "dumbed down," or "numbed down." They evoke a wide variety of feelings, including love, terror and spirituality. Some discuss God or the gods. They do all kinds of things forbidden in public schools. The one thing the stories have in common is that they are wonderful. People want to find out what happens next. And re-read them after they know what happens. That's why this literature is a firm part of western culture. It has quality.

Am I teaching western culture? Of course. We all need to be able to make sense out of a reference to an ugly duckling, to an emperor's new clothes, or to a Scrooge, or a nose that grows when you lie. Just in order to read an ordinary newspaper. Or to discuss racist or sexist stereotypes, which I do in Humanities 100. I don't apologize for increasing cultural

literacy.

Are students embarrassed by reading children's stories? They don't seem to be, perhaps in part because the book is an actual college textbook, with difficult (in reading level) biographical introductions for each author. It is used by those studying to be librarians, and others at college level. In addition, the stories can be read aloud to children. I ask the students to read aloud to a child at home. Most of their homes have few books, and perhaps this course helps a few children in our neighborhoods to acquire a respect or liking for reading. Reading at a low level is the biggest cause for dropping out of school in the Chicago system, according to a study done by the Board of Education recently. Each week, the Humanities 100 student who gets the highest grade on the quiz or exam wins a children's book, usually a little Beatrix Potter hardback, because of the illustrations.

WHAT DO WE DO IN THE COURSE? 1)There are twelve one-page written assignments, usually based on the readings. Some assignments deal with other aspects of the humanities, such as music, painting or architecture. 2)We do in-class work on the mechanics of English, sometimes correcting duplicated copies of their own work on the readings. We work on writing a synopsis of a short story, or a chapter or a paragraph. Picking out the main points is a skill they don't have. 3)We read aloud in class a lot, as well as read to children at home. We discuss the advantages to both reader and child, and I ask them each week what they have read and what reaction they got.

4)There are twelve letters to write, most of which are actually mailed. They are written in various roles--as citizens, as consumers, as friends, as future employees, etc. In addition to providing writing practice and teaching the format of a formal letter, this teaches the levels of American government, specific responsibilities at each governmental level, some

geography, etc. And students gain--and here I will use the jargon word "empowerment." After you have written a proper, acceptable letter to the president or prime minister of a country, politely requesting the release of a political prisoner who is being held for expressing an unpopular opinion, the local alderwoman or Commonwealth Edison is easy. 5)We practice map-reading, learn the sounds of the basic orchestral instruments, and make one trip on a weekend to the Art Institute. 6)They learn to use the PLATO system of teaching machines in our library. 7)A representative from a local battered women's shelter speaks to them, and this forms the basis for one writing assignment.

WHAT IS THE COURSE MEANT TO ACCOMPLISH? As you can see, I throw everything at them I can. They need everything. Most of all, I hope to improve the student's ability to read and write. Secondly, I try to introduce the fine arts, without duplicating the work of the regular courses that may follow. Third, I try to teach them habits that will make them more successful.

I insist that they act like serious college students. They are responsible for doing work on their own, they must attend class, they cannot barge in late and disrupt the class, and they must use white, unlined paper without ripped fringes along the left side. I know that English teachers and others do this as well, but in Humanities 100 I feel we have less pressure to prepare students for English 101, and thus more time for this kind of acculturation. There never seems to be too much of it.

We meet at the Art Institute one weekend. They travel there on their own, meeting me there. They will have to take such trips totally on their own in the college-level courses, and they need to reduce their fear of leaving their own neighborhoods. We begin to learn to talk about paintings while we're there, and they see that art can be pleasurable, and they may drop

their idea that museums are only for the wealthy.

I want students to experience pleasure in an educational setting, and to do this by reading literature that is comprehensible and interesting. This is a first experience for many students. They often surprise me by their response. I was apprehensive about using Louisa May Alcott, for instance, thinking that male students especially would not relate to the four sisters. I was wrong. They enjoyed talking about the characters, how they dealt with poverty, and how the personalities of the sisters were related to their birth order, just as in their own lives. Little Women is a nineteenth-century "soap" with ideas and ethics.

IS THE COURSE WORTH OFFERING? Yes, with reservations. To people who feel that no remedial course is worth offering in college, I admit I have not succeeded in helping a sixth-grade reader reach college level. Those who take the course should be at the high-school level to begin with. But, with a lot of energy and effort on the part of students and faculty, something of value seems to happen to those who miss the English 101 cut-off by a year or two. (They are taking other remedial courses, as well, of course, at the same time.) Students gain in ability and confidence, and seem more ready to begin the humanities survey courses. In the long run, we'll have more students at the college level.

This literature book is no magic wand. I am now teaching the course for the fourth time, and I am preparing to follow the Humanities 100 students in a more formal way later on to see how they do after the course in our department, Daley College, and elsewhere. At present, I can only report the impressions above.

Next semester, Daley will offer a block program for English 100-level students. Students will take Humanities 100, English 100, reading, speech

and counseling, with the core content coming from the children's literature anthology. A lot of research gives evidence that block programming offers all kinds of reinforcement. I'll try Humanities 100 again in the spring as a member of this team, hoping that the course is strengthened further.

A sample syllabus for this semester follows, listing daily assignments.

Nancy LaPaglia
Daley College, City Colleges of Chicago
October 1988

HUMANITIES 100C Fall, 1988 N. LaPaglia Room 3208

You will need for this course: Classics of Children's Literature, edited by Griffeth & Frey, Second Edition; some unlined white paper; a dozen plain envelopes; seven .25 stamps; & small stapler or a box of paper clips. The book is at Ford City East, and at the book-store across from Bogan H.S.

My office is 3313; the Humanities Dept. office is 3312. My telephone # is 735-3000 ex. 486 (secretary) or 466. Don't hesitate to see me or call me. Students absent more than SIX times will be dropped from the course, so save your absences for when you are ill or other emergencies. In addition, for every class that you miss, you must bring in a fantastic excuse (which I will explain). I am in my office before & after this class. I am also here on Tuesdays and Thursdays, before 9:25, between 10:45 and noon, and after 1:30. Make every effort to be on time for class, but it is better to be late than not to attend at all.

Grading policy: The mid-term and the final exams count for 2/5 of your grade, the written assignments for 1/5, the quizzes for 1/5, and attendance and classroom participation for 1/5. Get used to the idea that every time you walk into this class, you will have one piece of paper in your hand, ready to hand in.

Everybody in this class is eligible for free tutoring. If you wish to sign up for it, go to Room 1111 and speak to Mrs. Roccaforte. In addition, you will learn to use the PLATO tutoring machines in the library. We will take one trip to the Art Institute, probably on a Saturday or Sunday. We will do some reading aloud, preferably to children we know.

DATE	ASSIGNMENT
9/7	Introduction, questionnaire, Newberry (pgs. 36-38), Lear (pgs. 162-3)
9/12	Writing Assignment #1: fantastic excuse, Potter (pgs. 10-83-1137)
9/14	Letter #1: college catalog request (needs stamp & envelope). We will meet at the back of the library at the PLATO machines for this day only.
9/19	WA#2: poem, Perrault (Cinderella & Little Red Riding Hood), practice quiz
9/21	Let#2: Amnesty International (no stamp or envelope). Grimm (Snow White, The Frog Prince, Hansel & Gretel)

9/26 WA#3: synopsis of one folk take, Grimm (Aschenputtel & Rumpelstiltskin), prac. quiz

9/28 Let#3: city gov't. (s & e needed), Anderson (pgs. 127-8, 137-140, 143-148)

10/3 WA#4: 1st draft of resume, Jacobs (pgs. 811-819), Quiz #1

10/5 Let#4: state gov't. (s & e needed), Collodi's Pinocchio (first five chapters)

10/10 WA#5: synopsis of a Pinocchio chapter, Collodi (next 5 chapters), Quiz #2

10/12 Let#5: federal gov't. (s & e needed), Collodi (next 5 chapters)

10/17 WA#6: 2nd draft resume, Wilder's Little House (pgs. 1139-1149), Quiz #3

10/19 Let#6: consumer (S & e needed), Wilder, (pgs. 1150-1161)

10/24 Review for the mid-term

10/26 Mid-term exam

10/31 WA#7: architecture description, Baum's Wizard of Oz (pgs. 829-840)

11/2 Let#7: local administration (no S & e), Baum (pgs. 840-848)

11/7 WA#8: music description, C.S. Lewis (pgs. 1239-1249), Quiz #4

11/9 Let#8: fan (S & e needed), Lewis (pgs. 1249-1260)

11/14 WA#9: shelter information, Alcott's Little Women (pgs. 329-346), Quiz #5

11/16 Let#9: practice job application (no s & e), Alcott (pgs. 346-360)

11/21 WA#10: description of Alice, Carroll (pgs. 485-495), Quiz #6

11/23 Let#10: Amnesty International (no s & e), Carroll (pgs. 496-504)

11/28 WA#11: map exercise, Stevenson's Treasure Island (pgs. 673-683), Quiz #7

11/30 Let#11: thank you (e only), Stevenson (pgs. 683-693)

12/5 WA#12: painting description, Stevenson (pgs. 693-704), Quiz #8

12/7 Let#12: yourself (e only), Dickens' Christmas Carol (pgs. 169-183)

12/12 Dickens (pgs. 184-194), Quiz #9
12/14 Review for the final exam

12/19 Final exam
12/21 Go over final exam; grades available

DATE OF ART INSTITUTE VISIT: _____

Eight Newberry (Mother Goose) poems read first day of class were High Diddle-diddle, Jack and Gill, Hush-a-by-Baby, Pease-porridge Hot. Jack Sprat, The Pig Went to Market, BAH BAH Black Sheep, and Dickery Dickery Dock.

The three Lear poems were about the Man of the Dee, the Man and the Cow, and the Man with a Beard.

WRITING ASSIGNMENTS AND LETTERS FOR HUMANITIES 100

All writing assignments & letters must be written or typed (double spaced) on one side of ONE SHEET of unlined paper. Nothing else will be accepted.

WA#1 Fantastic Excuse: Write an entirely false fantasy excuse for why you were absent from class, the more imaginative the better. Every time you are absent in this class, you must come back in with one of these excuses. When I give WA#1 back to you, you may use it for your first absence.

Letter#1 College Catalog Request: Write a letter to the four-year college of your choice, asking for their catalog. Addressed envelope & stamp needed.

WA#2 Poem: Write two short poems, one that might be read to a very young child (pre-school), and one appropriate for a child who is in grade school.

Letter#2 Amnesty International: I will explain this in class, with a hand-out. We will write to a government head or official in another country. No stamp or envelope needed, as I will mail them myself in one large envelope.

WA#3 Synopsis: Write a short synopsis of any one of the folk tales we read by Perrault or Grimm. Leave out the small details, or you will run out of room. Write about the main events only. Be sure to include the beginning & the end of your story.

WRITING ASSIGNMENTS AND LETTERS FOR HUMANITIES 100

Letter#3 City Government: Write a letter to an official of our city government; e.g., the mayor, an alderman or alderwoman, or a department official. Your letter can ask for information, or complain or praise. Stamped envelope needed, correctly addressed.

WA#4 Resume: Write the first draft of your resume, following the model given to you in class.

LETTER#4 State Government: Like Letter#3, except to a state official, such as the governor or someone in the state legislature, or a department official. Stamped, addressed envelope needed.

WA#5 Pinocchio Synopsis: Write a synopsis of one chapter of Pinocchio. Be sure to include the beginning & the end of the main events.

Letter#5 Federal Government: Like Letters #3 & #$, except to a federal official, such as the President, or a senator or representative. Stamped, addressed envelope needed.

WA#6 Resume: Turn in a corrected, second draft of your resume.

Letter#6 Consumer: Write as a consumer to any company, store or utility. You may praise, complain, or ask for information. Stamped, addressed envelope needed.

THIS TAKES YOU UP TO THE MID-TERM. YOU WILL RECEIVE THE OTHER ASSIGNMENTS LATER.

Humanities 100: Writing Assignments and Letters for Remainder of the Semester

WA#7: Architecture description. Describe a building that you like in one paragraph. Take a good look at it before you write your description.

Let#7: Local administration. Write to anyone on the staff of Daley College. It can be President Conway, a dean, a teacher, the cafeteria manager, etc. You can praise, complain, or ask for information. No envelope or stamp needed. I will send them through inter-campus mail.

WA#8: Music description. Describe a piece of music you like. Listen to it carefully just before you write your description.

Let#8: Fan letter. Write a fan letter to anyone you want. She or he can be a recording star, a movie star or politician, or someone you know who is well-known. Stamped envelope needed, addressed correctly.

WA#9: Shelter. Write one page describing the things we should look out for in a person before we form a more permanent relationship with them, in order to avoid abuse.

Let#9: Job application. Choose a want ad from the newspaper, and write a pretend job application to that company. No envelope or stamp needed.

WA#10: Alice description. Write a two-paragraph description of the central character in Lewis Carroll's book. First paragraph: What does she look like? Second paragraph: What is she like?

Let#10: Amnesty International. The information for this will be given to you in class.

WA#11: Maps. This assignment will be given to you in class. Let#11: Thank you. Write a thank you letter to anyone you want to thank. This can be a family member, if you desire. If it is a personal letter, turn it in in a sealed and addressed envelope. A stamp is not needed if you are going to hand it to someone.

WA#12: Painting description. There are many framed prints hanging in the stairwells and halls of this college. Choose one you like and write a careful description of it. Be sure to include three things: 1)What is the subject matter? 2)How was it done? (color, shapes, etc.) 3)How does it make me feel?

Let#12: Yourself. Write a letter to yourself, telling yourself something you would like to accomplish by the end of this semester. (December, 1988) Enclose in a sealed, addressed, but not stamped, envelope.

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